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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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KEEPING THE FAITH.

"But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."—HEB. iii. 6, 14.

"Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."—HEB. x. 35, 36.

Who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews is not known, and probably never will be known. It is very evident that it was written in a time of great distress among the early Christians; and that it was designed to bring out such a view of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, his mediation, his ancestorship, and his connection with Providence, as should gird up men who were in great distress of mind, and were liable to be carried away from their conviction of Christ by the trials which they suffered.

The need of comfort and strength in pursuing a Christian life is just as great now as it was then, though it is very different. Then, men were suffering on account of expatriation, on account of positive persecutions, on account of various relations which existed in that early time, before the church was knitted together, and before any large experience had developed itself upon which they could base, in some sense,

SUNDAY MORNING, March 8, 1874. LESSON: Heb. xii. HYMNS: (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 981, 828.

their hope in Christ. But in every age of the world, men who have attempted to live an upright and just life, conformable to the divine requirement, a life redeemed from self-seeking, from animalism, and from the flesh, have always come, more or less frequently, to grief. In Scripture—in the Psalms, for instance (which are not merely Psalms of David, though he wrote a large part of them, but which are the effusions of Christian experience from many sources, under the one title of *The Psalms of David*, and which represent scores of singers) you will notice most extraordinary pleadings with God. Sorrow never anywhere else had such high utterance, I think, as there. Sorrows that take hold of every side of human experience, under sickness, under personal losses, under persecutions, under depressions of mind from various causes—all these abound in the Psalms. And down through the Prophets, and to the end of the Bible, there are the most pathetic and the most majestic implorations of the human soul with God.

In the time of our Saviour, and afterward, these phenomena, which always attend spiritual development, still continue; and in the primitive church, for reasons that I need not mention, and with which you are all familiar, there was a continual necessity of holding men steadfast by faith. It is by faith that we live. "We walk by faith, not by sight," as the apostle says. It is as if the whole ordinary ground of practical experience were swept from under us. We are not left on foundations where common men live. We are obliged to live by the invisible—the invisible world, the invisible God, the invisible Providence. We buoy ourselves up by the hope of an invisible reward.

Now, it was to such men as were overwhelmed by trouble of one kind or another that the book of Hebrews was largely addressed. You will observe, in the passages which I have read to you, how they were exhorted not to lose their confidence; not to give up their faith; not to relinquish their hope; not to let their belief in things divine go out; to see to it, that it went on to the end, as a lamp that could burn through the whole night, and not leave the watcher in darkness.

The alternations of feeling continue yet. I suspect that there is no church of any large membership in which there are not scores—in some instances hundreds—of persons who, if you were to take such a close and accurate account of their inward state as the physician does of their outward condition of health, would be found to live in despondency; who are brought, at one time or another, to the very verge of bankruptcy in faith, from a great variety of reasons; and who need special comforting, and enlightening, and consoling, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was brought into this world for the very purpose of giving comfort, and light, and consolation to men.

I propose, therefore, this morning, to consider some of the grounds on which men doubt, and on which they are vehemently tempted to give up their faith in religion altogether, or else their own personal hope in religion. I remark, in the first place, that many persons are tempted to give up their hope because their ideal of feeling is not realized. If religion is a perfected condition, transmitted to the human soul from the nature of God, then men have a right to be disappointed because it is imperfect in them. I will not say that men have altogether such an experience as this; but many men do have an experience which amounts very nearly to it.

Persons go, in New York, to Steinway's or Chickering's to buy a piano. From a large number of instruments they hope to get one that is perfect. They try one, and another, and another; and finally they make a selection. The instrument is sent home, and they suppose it to be all right in every respect, so that all they will have to do will be to play on it correctly. But they find that the keys are syphered, that some of them stick, and that some of them work too easy; that the chords are all wrong; and that when the instrument is brought to tune, it falls back again. And so they complain, and insist upon having a change, because the understanding was that they were to have a perfect instrument, whereas, they have received an imperfect one.

Persons think that if, while they are in a state of nature, they are overtaken by the spirit of God, somehow, by conversion, by an infusion of religion, they are brought to concert-

pitch; and they think that if they are really converted, if they are converted enough, they have nothing to do in life but to play on a perfected instrument. And when they find, as oftentimes they do, that there are no strings at all in the instrument, or that there are none that sound, or that there are none that sound otherwise than in discord, they do not like to say that they have been cheated, that they have had a spurious conversion put on them, but they are disappointed. When they find that they have not the feelings which they expected, they say, "I do not believe I am a Christian."

You will take notice how this feeling arises. First, it is an ideal which they form. They say, "Conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost, so that a man passes from death to life, from sin to holiness, is a conversion which makes him joyful; if I have had that change I ought to be joyful; but I am not joyful; I cannot be joyful; my life does not flow in the direction of joy; it flows the other way; and it is plain that I have no right to call myself a Christian."

This feeling is heightened on account of the remarkable experiences which other people have had, and have described. Nothing can be more profitably or judiciously employed than the rehearsal of men's joyous experience; but where, in class meetings, conference meetings, or declaration meetings, the statements are all on one side; where only persons who are of a hopeful disposition, who have an emotive constitution, and who are given easily to fluxes of feeling, pour out their ecstatic experiences, they hold up a kind of ideal to men who listen, and who say, "There, that is what I always supposed was being a Christian. See how triumphant they are. See how joyful they are. See how positive their convictions are. See how they almost behold the Lord. See how, in prayer, they enter into the very secret of the Almighty. See what peace they have. They tell us that they are conquering the world, and some of them feel that they have got it under their feet, and that they are treading it down. That is religion. Therefore, I have it not."

Well, now, in the first place, let me say that that is not religion—that is, if you mean that it is the exclusive form which religion takes on. What is religion? It is simply a

process that is entered upon, of moral transformation. It is an acceptance of the ideal of a true life as it is in Christ Jesus. It is the prescription of methods of living which are laid down for us in the New Testament. He who honestly, and with an intelligent purpose, undertakes to conform his common and natural life to this divine ideal, and sets about it, has begun a religious life. It is the undertaking of men to overrule their whole disposition, each man for himself, just as he happens to have been made. Some men are constitutionally obstinate; some are constitutionally proud; some are constitutionally very avaricious; some are full-freighted with dominant passions and appetites; some have large ideality; and some are plain, without a particle of imagination. There are all sorts of men, with all sorts of temperaments, and all kinds of life; and each one for himself undertakes this problem—namely, the transformation of his disposition so that all his power shall be Christ-like. Persons adopt this ideal of character, or that plan of conduct, and then act upon it.

No man can do this instantaneously. There is no miracle in conversion. It puts a man at school.

It is a great misfortune that in the translation of the passage, "Follow me, and become my disciples," the original was not given. The word which was translated *disciples*, simply means *pupils, scholars*. Christ, seeing some men following after riches, some after honor, some after lust, some after one thing, and some after another, says, "Follow me; be my scholars." Turning from the way they are living, and following the way which he prescribes for them, they say, "Well, I am willing to learn that way." Then he says, "Follow me. Let me be your Instructor. You be my pupils." People would understand that.

A man is unskillful of hand. He places himself at an art school, and says, "I am willing to be a draughtsman; I am willing to be a scholar; I am willing to be taught drawing." He is a scholar, a disciple, at the very beginning. Before he can make a right line, or a curve, he is a disciple. That is, he has put himself in the condition of learning, and he means to learn. When a man is called to be a scholar of

Christ, here is the school of Christ; here are the rules of character and life which Christ prescribes; and he says, honestly, "I am willing to be a beginner, a scholar, a learner, with the purpose of forming my life and character on the pattern of Jesus Christ." Having done so much, he has begun to be a Christian. I say *begun to be*, because the end is in the infinities. He has started on it.

When a man is willing to say, "I henceforth renounce worldly, selfish, proud ideals of life; and I take Jesus Christ, as depicted in the New Testament, for my visible Exemplar; and I take the rules and prescriptions of the Lord Jesus Christ to be my law; and with all the strength that is in me, I will strive to be imbued with these qualities, and to live such a life as he requires of me," then he is a scholar of Christ. It may be with large feeling or with little; it may be with many struggles or with few: nevertheless, he is Christ's pupil. For men come with infinitely diverse constitutions into this beginning of a Christian life. I am anxious that men should understand this, because otherwise they will fall, not into intentional insincerity, but into that which amounts to conventional insincerity.

Persons are stimulated by a general interest that is in the church, or in the community. Their moral feelings are carried up to a high pitch. They determine that they will go into the church. When they have got there they feel, "I have become a Christian, and by the grace of God I mean to live right." They do not know that right-living demands, from day to day, study and practice; they do not know that right spiritual living, like right bodily living, requires food every day to keep up vigor and strength; and after a very little time they begin to find that they are less and less interested; that then they are quiescent; and then insensible; and they look around, and say, "Well, this is about the way everybody else is living in this church, and I do not need to distress myself in the matter." So they take a kind of general idea from what they see in the organization to which they belong. And they say of one of the number, "That is rather a good man; he is in the church, and is trusting to the promises; he is not any more particular

about his own life, and that of his family, than I am about my life and that of my family ; and if he is safe, I am."

Thus a great many men settle down into a kind of ignominious content ; but there are a great many others who cannot do this. They have too much conscience. They have a conscience which is wrought upon by the imagination. They cannot believe that they are Christians when they do not seem so. They say, "If I am a Christian, I ought to be a full-fledged one ; if I am a Christian, I ought to have such, and such and such experiences, which I do not have. I pray for them, and strive after them, but I do not get them.

Oh that such a person could have some one to make an analysis of his mind, and show him where his nature was in disproportion, where rectification should take place, and where the power of grace was needed ! There are some persons who need divine grace to enable them to think better of themselves ; and there are some who do not. There are some persons who need divine grace to make them up, and bring them into life ; and there are some persons who do not need divine grace for any such purpose—they are too nervous and excitable anyhow. There are some persons who want more activity, and there are some who want less. There are some men who are too fruitful of thinking, and some who do not meditate enough. Men come to the beginning of Christian life with every conceivable disposition, and temperament, and character ; and religion in all is generically the same, while specifically it is different in each. No two persons on God's earth have the same thing to do in order to be a Christian. Each one is to take himself as he is in creation, with the inheritance which he received from his ancestors, and with the culture which he has acquired in the family and elsewhere, and is to say, "Now, I am to conform this, my nature, to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ and his precepts." The man who is basilar has one problem ; the man who is intellectual and without feeling has another problem ; and the man who has excessive feeling, with but little reflection, has another problem. The man who has many hardships to endure, and who is surrounded by ten thousand depressing

influences, has one field to struggle in; and the man who is in the midst of refinement has another and different field in which he works and strives. God calls every man to go through that experience which he needs.

A carpenter is sent for, and asked to look through a house, and report as to what he will put it in thorough repair for. He goes over it, from top to bottom, and says, "Well, I think I can put that house in order for about five hundred dollars." Another man says to the same carpenter, "I understand you have been looking at my neighbor's house, and that you have agreed to repair it thoroughly for five hundred dollars: I wish you would look at mine, and see what you can put that in order for." The carpenter goes through, and says, "I can do it for about fifteen hundred dollars." "Fifteen hundred dollars! You told that man you would do his for five hundred." "But his is a plain two-story house, there is no plumbing in it, its roof does not leak, and there are comparatively few things about it to get out of order; whereas, yours is a four-story house, with all the modern improvements, and there is everything to be done to it—the bath-room and water-pipes are out of order, the roof leaks, the walls are very much broken; and you had better pay fifteen hundred dollars, and feel yourself lucky to get off at that." To put still another man's house in order would cost, perhaps, five thousand dollars. The foundations are below the old grade, so that everything is damp and mouldy, and it must be raised up ten feet into the air before it can be made a place where a decent man ought to keep a respectable dog. Besides, the roof needs repairing. Then the house is mispartitioned, and the sizes and shapes of the rooms must be changed.

Every man's house must be put in order according to what it is. Men, in their own development, build all sorts of houses—some one-story, some two-stories, some three-stories, some four-stories, some five-stories, and some six-stories. Some are very low, some are intermediate in height, and some are very high. Some are narrow, and some are broad. They are built, too, with every conceivable difference of combination. As God sees it, in the whole world, the problem

of every man's life, which he has to solve, in conforming himself to the likeness of Christ, in bringing his higher moral powers into the ascendancy, in making the reason and the moral sentiments, according to the commands of Christ, govern the selfish, the animal, the lowest faculties of his nature—this problem in each man's life is different from what it is in the life of every other man.

Now, when men begin a Christian life you see what infinite blunders they may make. One man cannot pray; and he says, "Do you not suppose that if I were a true Christian I could pray.? I have tried to pray in my family; but I cannot get out a dozen sentences, I am so bashful. Then, I am all the time wondering, outside of my prayer, what folks will think about it. I have made the attempt time and again, and I cannot pray."

Another man is naturally voluble. He is like the faucets in your house, from which, when you turn them, and leave them turned, the water will run night and day. His complaint is that he is overrun with prayer. He wants to pray too much. His prayers are not real.

Much evil comes from the habit which persons have of comparing themselves with one another. Suppose a revival should break out in a band of music, and the different instruments should undertake to determine whether they were right or not by seeing whether they were like each other or not. The hautboy is in great distress of mind because it does not sound like the bassoon. "If the bassoon is right, then I am wrong," it says. The flute is greatly discouraged because it is not like the violoncello; and it says, "If that is right, I ought not to be here." The violin is very much concerned because it is not like the French horn. So each instrument is discontented because, by comparison, it has found that it differs from the others.

But is not each a musical instrument in its own way? Is it not the business of each to be musical according to its peculiar nature? They all have to be brought to some concert-pitch, so that their sound shall combine and harmonize; but an orchestra is made up of all sorts of instruments, some wooden, some stringed, and some brass; and each of them

has its own temperament, or tone; and when chorded and played according to their kind, they unite in making harmonious music; and the richness of this music depends upon the variety of instruments which are working in a certain line, in a given direction, and in harmony with each other. It is variety which makes the power and beauty of every orchestra.

Where two persons are identical in their religious life, I conclude that one or the other of them is mistaken; for every man has his individual character; and religion consists in the development of each man according as God, in his providence, made him; and where a man is developed so, he will not be just like anybody else. Love, faith, hope, and the other Christian elements act on different temperaments differently. Paul was probably the proudest of the Apostles; and John was probably the most fiery; and yet they were both magnificent examples of piety. Paul was not like John, and John was not like Peter. There were variations of individualism between them.

It is this want of an understanding of what is implied by entering a school of Christ that makes so many persons despondent in view of the result of their piety.

Secondly, there are a great many men who are discouraged, and who are ready to abandon their Christian profession, on account of the predominance of evil in them yet. They feel that a man who is a Christian would not deliberately do wrong. The ideal Christian of course would not, and your purpose as a Christian would not permit you to do wrong; but there is no man that liveth and sinneth not. If any man says that he does not commit sin, he is playing a juggler's trick with himself. There are a great many persons who say that they are perfect. There is no difficulty in being perfect if you bring down your standard low enough. If you say, "Oh, well, I may have my infirmities; I am subject, it is true, to uncontrollable outbursts of nature; I do a great many things that are wrong; but my purpose stands; I mean right; and I am perfect in this, that I never lose the steering-point," —if that is your idea of perfection, why, then, it is not difficult for a man to be perfect; but if perfection means the de-

velopment of every single faculty that is in a man, so that he shall have a sound mind in a sound body; if it means that he shall hold his twenty or thirty varying faculties so that they shall be entirely harmonious with each other, and be in relative subordination; if it means that he shall go on, from day to day, doing all that he ought to do toward God, toward his fellow men, and toward himself, and avoiding all that he ought not to do; and if, taking this view, he says, "I am perfect," then I have no terms by which to express my admiration for him. If it be true, my wonder is that he remains on the earth. It seems to me that such a perfected state as that belongs to another sphere, and not to the strife and struggle of this world. In contemplating it, I feel as I would if I went into an A, B, C, class, and found among the scholars a man who was perfectly familiar with all the higher forms of mathematics; who spoke nine living languages, and three or four dead ones; who was an encyclopedia of knowledge; and who was so learned that you could not touch him on any point where he was not *au fait*. If I saw such a man sitting with abecedarians, I should say, "What business has he in the primary school?"

Now, this world is but a primary school; we are learning elements here; and if any man has rounded out his disposition and character, and holds everything in equipoise, and is equal to the emergencies of life under all circumstances, and never fails to hit, he is out of his sphere, and he ought to be sent up through the academy, through the college, through the professional school, and, oh, a great deal higher than that!

There is no man that lives with any adequate sense of his situation here who does not feel that he has yet a great deal of work to do in subduing the dominant natural, selfish, worldly part of himself. We are born with a body, and we shall have to carry it as long as we remain in this world. We have a stomach and liver; and we shall not get rid of them during our earthly life. We have a brain; and that brain represents a great many appetites and passions which are very useful in subordinate relations; and it is our business, from youth to age, to understand and subdue these basilar in-

stincts, these physical qualities, these lower propensities. But the power to do that is not equally distributed. It does not belong, necessarily, to those who are naturally sincere. Men will frequently fall under some temptation when their intentions are perfectly good; and, under such circumstances they often say, "I thought that was conquered."

A man is rash with his tongue; he is an old swearer; he has been a ship-master (you know ship-masters fight gales with gales, and have an impression that emphatic things must have an emphatic utterance); and he is converted and joins the church, and folks think that he is a pretty good man; yet, on an unlucky day, something happens to disturb him, and before he knows it out comes a blast of fire; so he goes home, and says, "I have been for ten years a member of this church, and I have not got over swearing yet. How can I pretend that I am a Christian, and how can I believe that the grace of God is in my heart, when I swear?"

I think that many a man has the grace of God in his heart who swears. Not that swearing is a gracious habit; but that the grace of God, as administered before men, does not immediately take away any habit that has been introduced into the economy of life. I do not recommend swearing; I do not think it a sign of goodness; but I can see how a man might swear, in a moment of excitement, and not be half as bad as a man who never wants to swear. I have seen persons so contented with themselves, so perfectly satisfied with their attainments, so prospered, having all that heart could wish, so self-contained, and so self-admiring, that they never felt any impulse to swear in all their lives.

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

Now, if this be true in respect to the management of the tongue, how is it with regard to the employment of food and drink? Some men can bear stimulants, and some cannot [I do not mean simply alcoholic stimulants; I mean stimulants of any kind]; and where is there any prescription, where is there any rule of life, by which men may know what is wholesome and what is not wholesome for them to take into their stomach? There are many men who work from day to

day immoderately, and who by exhaustion are brought into a condition of despondency and gloom; and they are apt to over-eat. They seldom under-eat. But I have known cases where persons, by excessive fasting, lost their vital power. Most men, however, over-eat, or over-drink, and carry their body with too much work, and too little sleep, and do violence to the health of the animal on which their soul rides. Almost without instruction, they are following indulgences here and there, and clouding their conscience, and destroying their faith, and lowering the tone of their spirituality. They do not overcome the natural man; neither do they train the natural man; and often they are not taught to do it, nor helped to do it.

I have known persons who, having come into the church, complained that they had fallen upon days of darkness, and were told, "My dear madam, Satan is tempting you." I recollect the case of a woman who had such an experience during a revival in which she was profoundly interested. She was regarded as one of the saints of the church. Word was brought to me that she was in the depths of despair, that she had given up all hope, and that she thought she was doomed to hell. I had an interview with her, and the moment she came into my presence, I said, "Black hair; black eyes; an excitable temperament; slender constitution." I made inquiry, and found that that woman had been praying day and night. Besides having the care of her family, and working with three women's zeal, she had been carrying on this fiery fight for five or six weeks, and her nervous system was broken down, and she had rebounded into a state of despair. And some persons had said to her, "My dear madam, there must be some secret sin." She was sent hunting for secret sins. Others said, "My dear sister, pray to God to take you out of this condition." She had been beseeching heaven day and night; and she was put on a more intense diet and regimen. Others said to her, "Ah! it is the devil. You must fight against the devil." This was all well meant, but it was tending to drive the woman into insanity. She was within a hair's breadth of insanity when I saw her, and I said to her, after talking with her till I had gained her confidence, "Will

you obey me, on your honor?" I made her pledge herself. Then I forbade her praying another word. I said, "Until I give you permission, don't you dare to pray. And do you shut your Bible, and put it on the shelf, and don't you look into it. And I forbid you to go to any meeting. Now, take care of your family, and let those other things alone." I prescribed a course of outdoor exercise, certain kinds of food, and a little medication. I put her on her word of honor; and I knew that, being of a conscientious nature, she would not fly from it. It went on for about a fortnight, or three weeks, when she sent word to me that I must come and let her off; that she was so happy, and wanted to pray so, that she could not keep her vow any longer; that if I did not come and release her from her promise it would snap. She had rested; she had recovered the tone of her mind and body; and the moment nature had a fair chance everything came right.

Thousands and thousands of persons have been driven to despair by the very qualities in them which should have made them the most faithful and the most happy Christians. We are in a warfare here; but because "we wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places," it does not follow that we are rid of weaknesses in low places.

A man has temper, and it goes with him all through his life. We talk of *losing* temper: I never knew of any one's losing it yet. It is one of the things which we always keep.

We have our passions and appetites, and these we cannot wholly overcome. A man is suspicious and envious; but he cannot cure his suspicion and envy by going into the church. They must be cured by personal conflict in himself so far as they are cured at all.

When a boy begins to write he holds his pen in such a way that his fingers and hand are cramped, so that they have no freedom of motion; and he makes each particular letter in a mechanical way, and there is no ease about his writing; but we keep him at it, and keep him at it, and keep him at it, until he acquires both ease and facility; and we do not think it strange that a person has to be trained thus in the rudi-

ments of penmanship. But who undertakes to educate a child's spiritual nature in this way, so that the higher faculties shall have ascendency over the lower propensities? Who attempts by training to subordinate the animal nature to the moral? Yet, how much of darkness and stumbling arises from the ignorance of men as to how they should manage the points in them that are constitutionally strong, and that are so disproportioned that they need to be brought down, drilled, subordinated, and made to subserve the end of God's will in love!

There are multitudes of persons who lose their faith on account of their easy addiction to this world, and because they are perpetually falling into states of mind which are inconsistent with Christianity. It is true that there is such a thing as a love of the world which is not consistent with the love of God. The kind of world which means society, organized upon selfishness and frivolity, to the exclusion of the great elements of truth and morality—that kind of world it is which is so often spoken of in the Bible as an enemy to God. You cannot be a friend to the world in that sense, and be a friend to God also. But people think that by *the world* is meant *nature*, and that they have no right to love nature, and that they have no right to love common business, or that which the great outside world loves, or is in sympathy with, or is susceptible to. And yet, there is no harm in your loving the sky, the seasons, everything that is beautiful in nature; there is no harm in your loving the society of your fellow-men; there is no harm in your loving innocent amusements and recreations; there is no harm in your loving the things of the world; and there is no reason why you should not enjoy those things, provided they are not taken in excess. And what is excess must be determined by the person himself. What may be allowable to him may not be allowable to his neighbor, because his neighbor is different from him.

I do not eat salads. Because a Frenchman eats them, and finds them digestible, is no reason why I should find them digestible, and should eat them. The fact that a thing is wholesome for one person is no sign that it would be wholesome for another. The adaptability of any kind of food, or

drink, or exercise, or course, depends upon the person's temperament.

"All things are lawful," the apostle says. Of course crimes and vices are not lawful; but the ordinary elements of this life are lawful, if they are properly used, with reference to a man's highest good, with the great end in view of subordinating his own nature, including the highest faculties of his soul, to the will of God.

When a person comes into the church gay, sprightly, witty, social, these qualities ought to be retained, and consecrated to the service of God; but the tendency is almost always to suppress them.

A young woman is, at the age of eighteen or nineteen years, converted. She has been as light as a sylph; she has been universally sought; she has been the life of the company in which she has moved; she has been full of all that makes one attractive in society; but, now that she is converted, those peculiarities of her nature which so drew people to her have disappeared. She is no more bright, and gay, and joyous, and sylph-like, but is sober and restrained.

Alas! that men should have thrown overboard from the human soul the best things that we have in this poor crying, creaking, sinful world. God sent to men imagination, that when the hard and cold reality of life could not be borne, they might soar up into the realm of invisible things. This world is a great groaning machine which needs lubrication; and God sent humor to make its wheels run smooth. Men need something to relieve the sobriety of life; and God sent sparkling wit, by which to light a torch that should guide a thousand weary feet in right ways. But no, you have become a Christian; and as when persons go into a convent they wear black, so you think you must take on somber looks and manners.

I have seen persons misled in this way, so that they were stripped bare of all those qualities which simply needed to be sanctified (that is, inspired by the great law of love) to be serviceable to men. They were growing like wild unpruned trees, and they needed restraining, pruning, here and there; they needed thinning out; some parts needed to be taken

way; and yet they would have been valuable if they had, with these limitations, been allowed to grow according to their own inherent nature. But when religion found them, it hewed them down, and cut off their branches, and made square sticks of timber of them, and they were taken into the sanctuary and called "converts." They were divested of all nature, life, and beauty. There was nothing left but dry, hard, four-square sticks; and it is no wonder that they were spoiled by becoming religious.

Is there not such a thing as sanctifying to benevolence and spiritual life various faculties of one's being? Is there not such a thing as consecrating humor to the service of God? Is there not such a thing as being buoyant and witty, and yet being a Christian? Is it not fitting that a man who has imagination should say, "I will devote this gift to the benefit of humanity"? If a man has a cheerful disposition, is it not wise for him to say, "I am happy, and I can make other folks happy; and I will carry hope wherever I go"? Ought not every man to say, "I will use such light as God has given me to illumine the path of my fellow-men"? If a man has been endowed with traits which qualify him to make life easier and more pleasant for others, in the name of God let him consecrate them to the cause of Christ, and let him keep them.

Why, men, at first, are like diamonds, which, when found, are nothing but rough-looking stones. Diamonds, before they are ground and made radiant and beautiful, are an illustration of what men are in a state of nature. All that such men want is to be polished and made to shine. You cannot have wit enough, you cannot have humor enough, you cannot have good-nature enough, you cannot have artistic talent enough, you cannot have imagination enough, provided you appreciate their value, and see them in the light of the uses to which they may be put for the good of your fellow-men. And to any young person going into the church I would say this: All things are lawful, though all things are not expedient; all things are lawful, if you use them lawfully. In going into the church, you go into liberty, not into bondage; and if you can, consistently with your conscience, and with a spirit

of love to God and to men, use the gifts of nature which have been bestowed upon you, use them. They are your instruments. Many persons have their strongest point in imagination, and wit, and mirth; and to take these away from them would be like taking away the proboscis of a bee, so that he could not find honey, or like taking away the voice of a canary bird, so that he could not sing, and so that, being unable to sing, he would be good for nothing.

When Antoinette Sterling—blessed be her memory!—was here, singing in our choir, she used to go to the mission schools, and among the poor and ignorant, and sing to them: and she once said to me, "I thank you for teaching me that this is my way to do good—singing to people, and making them better and happier."

Why, if a man should shut up all the windows of his room, and close the batten blinds and the Venetian shutters, and roll down the curtains, and then should say, "It seems to me as if the sun had abandoned me;" he would be like many Christians who shut up all the avenues of knowledge through which they are accustomed to receive light, and then mourn at their loss, and wonder what ails them.

There are also many persons who are driven from goodness by adversity. Adversity often draws men toward things higher and better. Afflictions frequently act for our benefit, in ways which we do not understand, or do not take into consideration. I have known persons who were timid and overcautious, and who were so dispirited and overwhelmed by continuous misfortune, that they were broken down, their nervous system not being able to bear the strain. Again, I have known persons who were proud and sensitive, and who were angered by the continued beating of adversity upon them. The effect was to bring them into such a state that at last they became morbid. I have known persons whom protracted misfortune threw off from their balance. I have known persons who, through adversity, lost their sense of the relative proportion and magnitude and importance of things. But, on the other hand, I have known proud men who never appeared so well as after they had been broken down and humbled by adversity,—men who, in ordinary pros-

perity, were worldly and greedy, and incautious, and careless, but who, after they had been plowed and harrowed awhile, brought forth true wheat. When men have been overwhelmed by adversity it is the inward condition of their mind that determines very much the effect which it will have on them. There are not many birds that sing in the night, and there are fewer men who sing in the night—that is, when they are in trouble—and mount up in joy, and live above this world, by the power of the world to come, and live by dispositions ministered to by the Holy Ghost, and by truths ministered by faith. There are multitudes who, when they have resisted, and resisted, and resisted, finally become discouraged, and give up their faith.

Then, there are many who give up their faith because they are so beset by skeptical doubts; by questionings in regard to the inspiration of the Bible; by speculations as to the reality of events which are historically recorded; by debates as to whether Christ was a mythical or an actual personage; by various questions on psychology. Men exercise their minds on these subjects until they are twisted and snarled almost beyond their power of unraveling them. Men raise inquiries covering almost the whole ground of human knowledge, and almost the entire realm of human investigation. A man may start queries which shall lead to skepticism from which he shall be utterly unable to extricate himself. But one may obtain relief, under such circumstances, from the reflection that whatever may become of the Old Testament and the New Testament; that whatever may become of schools and churches and philosophers, he has a right to live, and should live, by his reason—by his reason imbued with benevolence toward God and toward men. It is the duty of every man to overcome the flesh, and be guided by the great law in himself of purity, of truth, of honor, and of fidelity. His business is to aim, in his life, at the welfare of men and the glory of God. And the success of his life does not depend upon the integrity of the Old Testament or of the New. You may take away the Bible, and the truth that has already come into the world will stand. The pattern of a Christian life, as laid down in

the New Testament, will endure, no matter what becomes of the Gospels, or of the Epistles. That lives as a fact, and is the best thing that belongs to humanity; the thing that is the best worth any man's seeking; the thing that is noblest and highest; the thing that is the most fruitful of joy here, and that has promise of the greatest joy hereafter.

Suppose all the chariots of old were vain? Suppose all the letters of Paul were vain? suppose the whole Bible were vain? If the conception of humanity, if the ideal of character, if the vision of God, if the divine power which comes out of it, and which thousands and tens of thousands have tried and found to be real, remains, I do not care what becomes of the old coach, or the mail-bag which brought me the letter of good tidings. I have the thing—life and immortality brought to light—in my soul, and thousands of others have it in their souls, and what do I care for the vehicle?

(I am arguing as if I were another. I do care very much. Precious to me is the Old Testament, and exceedingly precious to me is the New Testament. They are the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation to those who know how to use them. But if a man says to me, "I have found flaws in the Bible," I say, "That makes no difference; it is but the vehicle of the great saving truths that it brought to us; and these truths, being in our possession, would be ours still, if this vehicle were destroyed. They will continue to exist by virtue of their own nature, and not by virtue of the validity of the Bible.")

So long as I do not know the facts of a case, it makes a great deal of difference who makes the statement—whether a well dressed, intelligent looking man, or a ragged urchin; but after I have found out the facts it does not make any difference who makes it. If that little ragamuffin told the truth it is true, no matter how little or ragged he is. After the truth is once told its truthfulness does not depend on the one who brought it, or the source from whence it come: it depends on what it is in its own nature.

In regard to everything in the world, while the truth is being tried, while it is attempting to prove itself, the question is very important of the relative value of this or that

estimony, of this or that witness; but when the *thing* has nce been demonstrated and brought out, it does not make ny difference who the witness was that gave the testimony.

When my schoolmaster had satisfied me that two and two nade four, I was as well satisfied of it as if I had stood with Moses on Mount Sinai, and had heard it proclaimed there.

And once, experimentally, get the conception before the ninds of men of salvation by Jesus Christ; once let the ruth of God's saving grace become known by the race of nankind; once let that prescription get into the world, and nough you destroy the vehicle, the thing itself remains. ome secrets of science have been lost; but no great spiritual ruth that is vital to society or the world was ever lost, or will ver be lost, having once been gained.

Now, then, in these times of slow spiritual growth, of isappointment, of social changes, of personal affliction nd adversity, in this age of doubt and skepticism and ifficulty, when so many men who were piously educated say, I cannot pray as I used to pray; I cannot think about unday as I used to think about it; I cannot feel as I used o feel; I cannot go to church any more; I must give up verything; I am all unsettled; I have lost my belief," they nould be exhorted to hold on to their faith. You say that ou have lost your belief. No, you have not lost your belief nat you are feeble. You have not lost your belief that you re sinful and imperfect. You have not lost your belief that ou yearn for something higher than the present and the isible. You have not lost your belief that there is no peace or you in the way that you are now living. You have not ost your belief that there is a God, and that it is your duty o love and worship him. You have not lost your belief in nanliness, in truth, in fidelity, in self-sacrifice, in disinter-sted love, and in the necessity of building your character igher than the waves of passion can reach to dash over it.

All these paraphernalia of history—churches, and syna-ogues, and temples, and books, and priests, and liturgies—ere sent to bring to the minds of men the fact that they re children of God, born of the clod, and that they are o work their way up out of the dirt. As the sweet, fair,

white flower works its way from the soil up to the blossom, under the sun; so men are to work their way up from the lower forms of nature till they blossom in the very breath of the bright beauty of the God that loves them.

These truths remain. You say that revelation brought them. Another man says that they came in some other way. There are various opinions as to how they came. It matters little how they came. You cannot take them away from me. And they are yours. So there is no reason why you should give up your faith, and desert your father's and mother's instruction. In respect to a thousand experimental things men may change indefinitely; but oh, give not up your faith that at death you begin to live! Give not up the faith that you live forever! Give not up your faith that in this great, wondrous, but yet blind world, there is a presiding Deity! Give not up the faith that that Deity is named Love! Give not up the faith that he is drawing you by your best feelings toward him, from day to day, that you may be like him! Give not up the faith that you must deny yourselves, and overcome your sins, and build your character higher than society requires it to be built, if you are to become sons of God! Give not up your father's and your mother's faith, which consists simply in this, when reduced to its elements: I am sinful, and Christ died for sinners. Cling to that, live by that, and it will stand by you in the dying hour, and carry you through the flood and the night to the shore unwet with tears—to that blessed hemisphere from which drops down no sorrow.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

O LORD our God, we pray that thou wilt accept the dearly beloved children that have been brought into thy presence, and before these brethren, this morning. May these parents know that they do not love their children as thou lovest them and their offspring; and may they have faith, as they have attempted to commit these children to thy care and provident kindness, that thou wilt hear, that thou wilt think, and that thou wilt not forget their little ones. We beseech of thee that their lives and their health may be precious; and if they abide on the earth may they be a light and a joy in the household. We pray that they may grow up to honor, to virtue, to fidelity and to piety, loving God and loving men; and may they be useful in all their lives. We pray that as soon as their opening minds shall discern between the right and the wrong, between things high and things low, they may be influenced so that they shall be led to everything that is noble and pure and good.

Wilt thou sustain these parents as they struggle with the dispositions of these children, and seek to guide them aright; to break down unlawful pride in them; to restrain them from temptations of selfishness; to win them from the flesh. May they never lose hope and faith. May they trust in God, feeling confident that all shall be well.

We pray, O God, that thou wilt remember all who have brought hither their beloved children. We thank thee that some of those who have been brought have grown up, and have come again, bringing their children to be baptized here. We remember the multitude of those who have been consecrated in the presence of the brotherhood; and we pray for them all. We pray for those who are bereaved, and mourn over children that are gone—not lost, but gone before, and saved. We pray for all those who are growing up, and for those on whom the care of raising up their children rests heavily. Give them faith, and hope, and patience, and wisdom.

We know that these outward forms are insignificant of themselves; we know that here we can only indicate what is to be done; we know that the work is with thee, and with thy servants, under thy guidance; and we pray that in this greatest work which we love upon earth—the rearing of immortal souls for honor and immortality—we may be stirred up continually, and more and more abound in all wisdom and faithfulness.

Bless, we pray thee, all who are gathered together this morning. Remember any who are in trouble and affliction. Thou art the God of the night as well as of the day—though there is no night with thee. Grant that the darkness of this world may seem to thy people as the mere overshadowing of thy wings. We pray that there may be a covert for every one who is depressed, and pursued, and overtaken by besetting sin. May every one who is cast down find in thy presence help in trouble. We pray for every one who is in darkness respecting his own estate, for those who yearn, who call, and who are not answered. Lead them out of darkness, we beseech of thee, into

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* Immediately following the baptism of children.

the full experience of the blessedness of Christian believing. Reveal thyself to those who sit in darkness and see no light. Be their Saviour, saving them from sin; saving them with all the power of thy promises; saving them by the truth; saving them by the use of whatsoever means thou wilt.

Lord, take away from us, we beseech of thee, all despondency; take away from us all giving up; take away from us all disposition to say, It is enough; take away from us all disposition to lay aside the warfare till thou art willing. May every one stand in his place knowing that God has ordained the days, the nights, and the years, and the forces thereof, in such a sense that when it is time for him to go home thou wilt call him. May every one wait, and wait with his lamp burning, and his loins girt about, doing all his duty. And having done all, may thy servants stand—till the morning, till the noon, till the night, and to the end.

Go, we beseech of thee, to all those who are separated from us, and whose hearts are yearning for the privileges of the sanctuary, and for the fellowship of thy people.

Grant thy blessing to rest upon those who labor with us in word and doctrine. Wilt thou bless those who care for the outcast, the poor and needy; those who are instructing the ignorant in our schools—the children, the men and the women, who are gathered in, and made to hear the blessed tidings of the love of God through Jesus Christ. May the work prosper. May it not be overshadowed or neglected. May the faith of thy servants not fail.

Bless, we pray thee, all instrumentalities, everywhere, that are employed to spread abroad a knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Let thy kingdom come, and thy will be done. Fill the whole earth with thy glory.

We ask it in the name of the beloved, to whom, with the Father and the Spirit, shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

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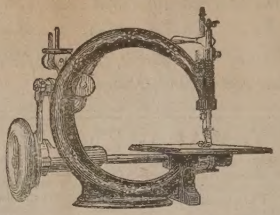

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